Faith & Inspiration

Abiding Beyond the Law

By Vincent V. Marshburn

Any societies that have persisted for any period in history have typically formulated a codification of statutes and ordinances intended to establish foundations for exercising jurisprudence and procedures for dispensing justice.

Records of formalized decrees, rulings, regulations, and other legal conventions have been identified from a diverse range of ancient civilizations, extending as far back as several centuries and even millennia. From Sumer and Babylon to ancient Greece and Rome to India and China, it can be observed that it is often deemed necessary and practical to inscribe and preserve documentation of legislative and judicial precedent which can serve to define the desired patterns of disciplined and equitable communities.

Of particular interest to believers is the Biblical account of the endowment of Mosaic law. Many of the words spoken by God directly to Moses were written down in a Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:4, 7). Some key spiritual and practical principles — famously referred to as the "Ten Commandments" — were engraved in stone by God himself (Exodus 31:18; 34:28). This monumental charter guided the transformation of a wandering amalgam of tribes into a respectable and flourishing nation intended to illuminate the world with God's light of truth and love.

It is true that we do not depend on the Mosaic Law for our salvation, relying instead on the grace bestowed by the redeeming nature of Jesus's ultimate sacrifice (Romans 3:20-26). As Scripture asserts, the Law does serve to highlight our need for redemption in the first place, essentially underscoring our inability to fulfill God's requirements of righteousness on our own (Deuteronomy 27:26; Romans 5:20; Galatians 3:10).

At the same time, law and order in a society can enforce the guard rails which help constrain and regulate certain human impulses, striving to impart stability and security for the denizens of the land (Romans 13:1-7). With regard to laws of the land in general, other parts of Scripture remind us that as believers we remain subject to earthly authorities, insofar as such governing individuals and institutions do not curtail or contravene our submission to God's ultimate authority, especially as it concerns our calling to live out the Gospel (Acts 4:18–20; 5:29).

One might be inclined to contemplate the question of whether there is such a thing as "good" or "bad" law or government.

In the United States, we tend to extol the virtues of our Constitution, emphasizing the insight and forethought that the founders imbued into the original document and its ensuing Bill of Rights. While no set of human-defined laws are bound to be perfect, a sensible analysis of the U.S. Constitution reveals that many of its principles appear to have been motivated by an understanding of certain Biblical precepts and wisdom, such as notions of inherent dignity, natural rights, fairness in justice, and even religious freedom.

Those of us who are blessed to enjoy the privileges of individual opportunity, self-determination, expression of thought and opinion, and exercise of conscience do well to appreciate and uphold these prerogatives. Laws can bestow liberties, but they also stipulate responsibilities to those under such domain. Sometimes these responsibilities can include working to ensure the most fair and impartial application of those laws.

In an episode of the "Star Trek: The Next Generation" television series, Lieutenant Commander Data, the android second officer aboard the 25th-century USS Enterprise, becomes the subject of a philosophical, technical, and legal debate regarding the definition of sentience and "personhood." This comes as the result of a Starfleet cybernetics scientist, Bruce Maddox, desiring to dismantle Data for research purposes.

Naturally, Data's fellow crew members object to such a seemingly callous and inhumane attitude towards their friend and shipmate. Data equates the demand from Maddox to requiring a biological individual to undergo a non-consensual medical procedure, and resorts to resigning his commission with Starfleet in order to avoid Maddox's scheme.

Maddox continues to insist that Data is merely the property of Starfleet and must comply with all claims on him, prompting Captain Picard to request a formal hearing on the matter of Data's sentience and status as an individual person. Picard himself will serve in Data's defense.

Picard does his utmost to leverage his understanding of Federation law to support his position before the Judge Advocate General, Phillipa Louvois.

PICARD: Commander [Maddox], is your contention that Lieutenant Commander Data is not a sentient being and therefore not entitled to all the rights reserved for all life forms within this Federation?

MADDOX: Data is not sentient, no.

PICARD: Commander, would you enlighten us? What is required for sentience?

MADDOX: Intelligence, self-awareness, consciousness.

[New Scene]

PICARD: What is he?

MADDOX: A machine!

PICARD: Is he? Are you sure?

MADDOX: Yes!

PICARD: You see, he's met two of your three criteria for sentience, so what if he meets the third, consciousness, in even the smallest degree. What is he then? I don't know. Do you? ...

[New Scene]

LOUVOIS: ... This case has dealt with metaphysics, with questions best left to saints and philosophers. ... Is Data a machine? Yes. Is he the property of Starfleet? No. ... It is the ruling of this court that Lieutenant Commander Data has the freedom to choose.

Picard is greatly relieved to find that submitting to the appropriate process of the law has achieved just and reasonable results.

As a believer, abiding by the laws of the land can be seen as a kind of divine charge. By demonstrating our recognition of God's ultimate authority and submitting to those he ordains to function as governing agents, we seek to conduct ourselves as the ideal citizens. As long as we are not being compelled to violate our spiritual duty to the kingdom of heaven, we are exhorted to honor the legal systems which are intended to preserve the peace and deter offenders (1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1).

In this sense, we are called to be law-abiding citizens as much as is practical and justifiable by the Spirit.

We also understand that our calling to manifest God's redemption through grace extends beyond the law as we endeavor to embody his love to those around us.

Lifestyle

Homestead High Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

By David Volz

Homestead Senior High School students had a fun and educational experience celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month.

"Our school had a month-long celebration where every week there was an event that involved Hispanic heritage," said Samuel Louis, principal.

One favorite event was Dominoes with Dad, an event where fathers played dominoes with their students at the school.

"Dominoes with Dad is a big unifier of people within the Hispanic community, and we brought fathers and father figures to engage in games of dominoes. After the games, the fathers and students had pizza and doughnuts together," said Louis.

There was also a guest speaker who spoke with the fathers on the importance of legacy building with their families, as well as two Fridays where grandparents could spend time with their grandchildren.

"One grandparent said, 'I don't know how much time I have left, but I want to spend more time with my grandchildren,'" said Louis.

An important goal for Louis is to bring parents and community leaders to Homestead Senior High and get them involved in the school community.

There is plenty of school spirit at Homestead High, and many students are active in clubs and music programs.

Estudiantes Homestead High Celebran el Mes de la Herencia Hispana

Por David Volz

Los estudiantes de Homestead Senior High School disfrutaron de una experiencia divertida y educativa celebrando el Mes de la Herencia Hispana.

"Nuestra escuela tuvo una celebración de un mes en la que cada semana había un evento relacionado con la herencia hispana", dijo Samuel Louis, director.

Uno de los eventos favoritos fue Dominó con Papá, una actividad en la que los padres jugaron dominó con sus hijos en la escuela.

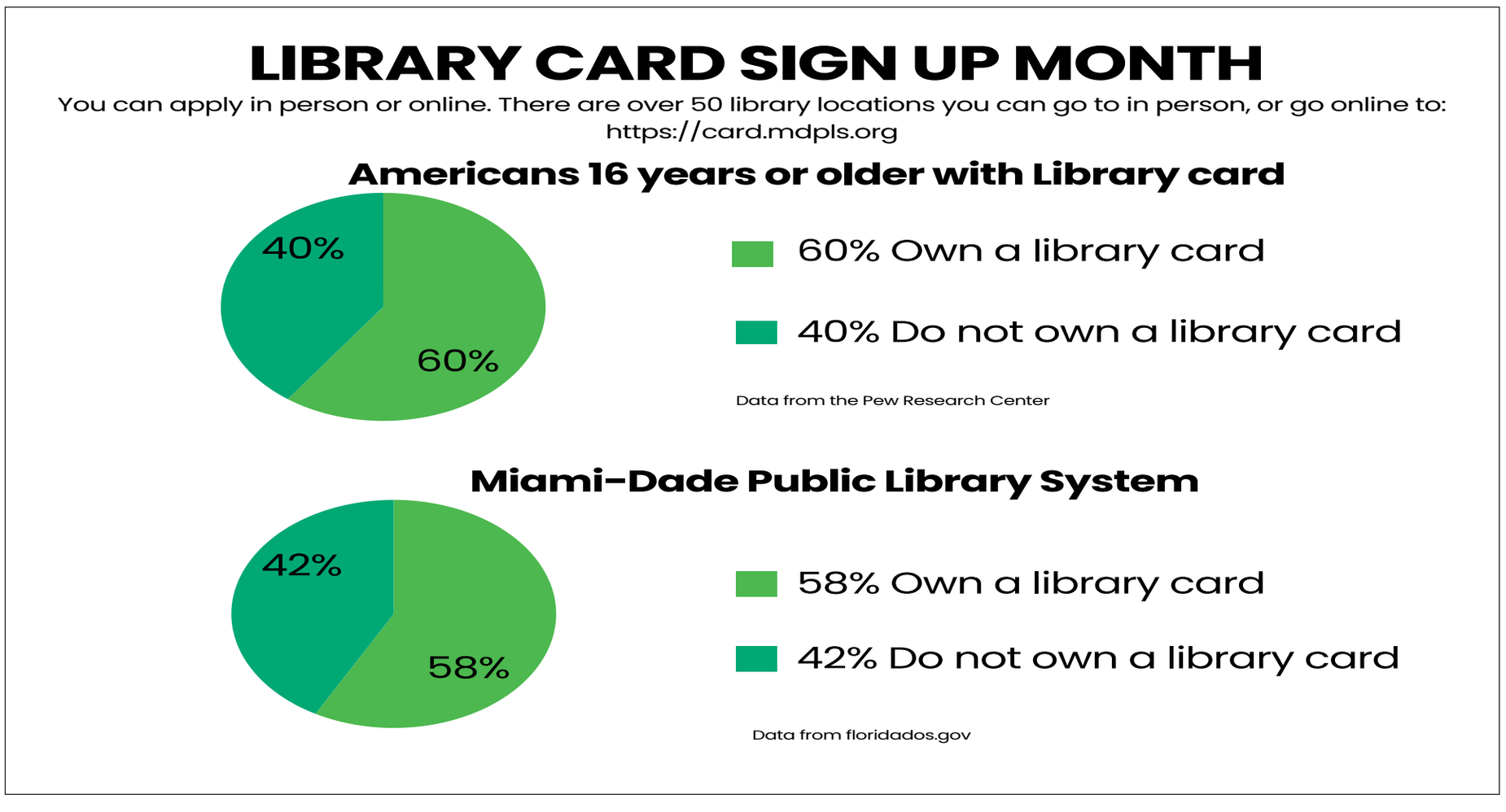
"Dominó con Papá es un gran unificador de personas dentro de la comunidad hispana, y trajimos a padres y figuras paternas para participar en juegos de dominó. Después de los juegos, los padres y estudiantes compartieron pizza y donuts", dijo Louis.

También hubo un conferencista invitado que habló con los padres sobre la importancia de construir un legado con sus familias, y dos viernes en los que los abuelos pudieron pasar tiempo con sus nietos.

"Un abuelo dijo: 'No sé cuánto tiempo me queda, pero quiero pasar más tiempo con mis nietos'", comentó Louis.

Un objetivo importante para Louis es traer a padres y líderes comunitarios a Homestead Senior High y lograr que se involucren en la comunidad escolar.

Hay mucho espíritu escolar en Homestead High, y muchos estudiantes participan en clubes y programas de música.


LIBRARY CARD SIGN UP MONTH
You can apply in person or online. There are over 50 library locations you can go to in person, or go online to: https://card.mdpls.org
Americans 16 years or older with Library card
40%
60%
60% Own a library card
40% Do not own a library card
Data from the Pew Research Center
Miami-Dade Public Library System
42%
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58% Own a library card
42% Do not own a library card
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